



SENATE MINORITY LEADER

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Senate Bill 356 Fact Sheet – Victim Photos for Parole Hearings

SUMMARY

The Board of Parole Hearings (Board) enacted a policy to no longer accept photos deemed “graphic” to be considered at parole hearings. The commissioners making the parole decision are no longer able to consider the photos at hearings because the Board rejects the photos at the time of submission. This causes commissioners to not have all necessary information during their parole suitability decisions, a practice unfair to victims and their families.

BACKGROUND

In January 2024, the Board enacted a new policy that it would no longer accept photos that it deemed to be “graphic.” Prior to that, the Board accepted these photos to supplement an inmate’s file for commissioners to examine at parole hearings. Commissioners routinely used the photos to assist them in making parole suitability decisions at parole hearings and discussed them on the record.

At the February 2024 BPH Executive Board meeting, numerous victims and their families were joined by prosecutors and victims’ rights advocates to speak out against the Board’s new policy. However, the Board has refused to alter the new policy, even after hearing powerful statements from victims and their families.

PROBLEM

Crime victims and their families do not choose to be involved in the criminal justice system; they are mercilessly pulled into it. Crime scene photographs, autopsy photographs, and other graphic photographs are unfortunately the lasting memory that many victims’ families are left with. These unfortunate individuals were victimized initially by

the crime, and then victimized again by having the photographs of the tragedy endured by the victim rejected and not even be allowed to be considered.

Limiting commissioners’ access to all available information at parole hearings when making decisions about letting criminals out of prison is a concerning practice that endangers the public safety of our communities. Restricting the commissioners from using relevant and reliable evidence at parole hearings undermines their duty to the public and infringes on their ability to ensure that inmates who still pose a danger to the community are not released from prison.

SOLUTION

SB 356 will assure that the Board must accept relevant photographs for consideration at a parole hearing. Victims and their families will have the lasting memory of their loved ones, no matter how graphic, considered when the commissioners make parole suitability decisions.

The bill will also assure that commissioners have all necessary materials to make sound decisions at parole hearings, ensuring that dangerous inmates are not wrongly released into the community to create new victims.

SPONSOR

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